

NOTES AND COMMENTS

I

Holy Trinity and Holy Tradition: Orthodox Contributions to "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry"

What has the Orthodox contribution meant to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*? Let it be said both officially and fraternally: everything!

The Lima text is likely the most Orthodox-inspired document ever produced by the World Council's Faith and Order Commission. Not too many years ago, fidelity frequently demanded that Orthodox contributions to ecumenical texts be limited to dissenting appendices. In contrast, the Orthodox contributed substantially to the Lima text at every stage of its collegial development: conferences, specialized consultations, editorial team production and critical evaluation of earlier draft texts.

When in January 1982, the Orthodox (Eastern and Oriental) joined their Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Anglican and Protestant fellow members in unanimously endorsing the Lima text's transmission to all churches for official study and action, they were also publicly acknowledging their own theological coauthorship and ecumenical collaboration.

In highlighting the most formidable Orthodox contribution to this lengthy study process, I would cite the clarity of vision regarding the document's ground and goal. "Look to the Holy Trinity through the holy tradition"—that Orthodox perspective qualitatively infused and decisively influenced many of the text's individual convergence statements.

It is illuminating that church leaders are now being asked explicitly to employ a universal (orthodox) norm for evaluating the material: "the extent to which your church can recognize in this

text the faith of the Church throughout the ages." On that basis, they are then asked to draw ecumenical consequences for their life and work together.

Throughout the entire process of preparation, Protestant, Anglican and Roman Catholic colleagues were constantly helped to avoid redebating all the relative merits of the Augsburg Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles, the Institutes of the Christian Religion and the decrees of the Council of Trent. Instead they asked, what belongs to church dogma and what is personal theologoumena? What is essential to that faith "once-for-all delivered" to the saints? Which aspects of the theme have been directly related to the problems of mutual recognition leading to unity?

In doctrinal rigor and ecclesial loyalty, the commission has intentionally employed that universal norm of the early Church as reformulated at the Montreal World Conference (1963): "the tradition of the gospel testified in scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit."

At the same time, the Orthodox exercised a welcome moral authority in their persistent witness that theology is finally in the service of doxology. Theological polemics were transfigured in the realization that orthodox beliefs ultimately pointed beyond themselves to the adoration of the triune God. He alone is the living Lord, whose trinitarian unity is the ultimate ground of all genuine Christian ecumenism.

By way of illustration, after many days of fervent debate at Lima on the carefully nuanced wordings of the convergence text, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" that the insights of the text also be employed to compose a eucharistic liturgy whose solemn celebration would conclude the commission meeting on its last night. Of course, the Orthodox members could not (yet!) concelebrate. Nevertheless, they were all as reverently present as had been their non-Orthodox friends, a few days earlier, in order to be led by Frs Cyrille Argenti and Thomas Hopko in observing the sacred Orthodox rites of the Blessing of the Waters on January 6 and the Christmas liturgy on January 7.

It is now hoped that the holy Orthodox Church will continue to bless the entire ecumenical movement by its vigorous participation in the recently initiated process of "reception."

It may be unqualifiably asserted that the unique ecclesiological self-understanding of Orthodoxy is being both revered and meticulously respected. The unofficial "convergences" of a theological commission of an association of churches, however significant and unprecedented they may be, are not in any way being confused with

the "consensus" decrees of an authentic and authoritative council of the whole ecumenical church (*concilium* or *synodos*). As taught us by St John Chrysostom, "From the very beginning, the apostles proclaimed, and after them the Nicene Council confirmed, that the proclaimed faith is ecumenical. Although the number of those assembled was so large, only seven cast negative votes, and those were cast out. The whole *oikoumene* approved because it was apostolic."

Therefore, as outlined in the preface to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, it is the churches themselves that are now being respectfully invited by 1985 to prepare an official response to the text at the highest appropriate level of authority. It is the intention of Faith and Order to compare all the official replies received, to publish the results, and to analyze the ecumenical implications for the churches at a future world conference on Faith and Order.

In the meantime, during the spiritual process of "reception" for discussion of the *sensus communis* of the hierarchy and the whole people of God, the priests and the laity of the churches will also have another three Faith and Order books available for their self-determined study and action:

- (1) a "case study" manual for lay instruction;
- (2) a volume of theological essays for scholars;
- (3) a collection of liturgical rites and worship resources for celebrations in local parishes.

In conclusion, I believe it is imperative that the Orthodox Church gives *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* the prompt and serious consideration it deserves. If it is simply ecclesially disregarded or canonically dismissed on the purely technical ground of its admittedly unusual source, we will lose the benefit of the ecumenical labors of some of the best patristic scholars of our generation. Contrary-wise, in response to the leading of God the Spirit, the Orthodox Church can now provide ecumenical leadership, second to none, for the entire *oikoumene*, in basing the vision of visible church unity in one apostolic faith and one eucharistic fellowship on the adoration of the Holy Trinity through holy tradition.

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